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ABSTRACT

A dropout prevention program was developed to address the needs of middle school alternative students, those students who have been labeled as severely disruptive and who fall into the high-risk category for potential dropouts. Many of the students have a history of physical violence, abusive language, truancy, and police arrests or juvenile detention records. The program was designed to reduce absenteeism by 30%, increase self-esteem by 30%, and increase positive school attitude by 30% through the use of peer group counseling. The setting was a self-contained alternative program with a student-teacher ratio of eight to one. Eighteen students completed the program during its 10-month implementation period. An analysis of data compiled over that time showed a 14% decrease in truancy and a 16% average gain in self-esteem. There was a 26% positive gain in student attitudes toward school between pretest and mid-year test while all variables were constant. A comparison of the mid-year test and posttest results showed a 25% negative decrease in positive school attitude, influenced by an unexpected administrative and disciplinary code change at mid-year. The program was instrumental in uncovering a series of obstacles to the institution of peer group counseling within an alternative education program. (Author/NB)

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PRACTICUM REPORT

Center for the
Advancement of Education
Ed.D. Program

A Drop Out Prevention Program Utilizing Peer Group Counseling With Middle School Alternative Students

by

Gint V. Nenortas

CG 020384

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NOVA UNIVERSITY

A Drop Out Prevention Program Utilizing Peer Group Counseling With Middle School Alternative Students

by

Gint V. Nenortas

Cluster XVIII

A Practicum II Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program
in Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY
1987

PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Gint Nenortas under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

Aug 7, 1987

Date of Final Approval of Report

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ABSTRACT

A Drop Out Prevention Program Utilizing Peer Group Counseling With Middle School Alternative Students. Nenortas, Gint V., 1987: Practicum Report, Nova University Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Drop Out Prevention / Peer Counseling / Alternative Education / Adolescents / Middle School.

This practicum addresses the need for a drop out prevention program with middle school alternative students. These students have been labeled as severely disruptive and fall into the high-risk category for potential drop outs. They have a history of physical violence, abusive language, truancy and in many cases, police arrests and juvenile detention records. The setting was an alternative program with a student teacher ratio of 8/1. All of the classes were self-contained.

The writer's goals were: (a) reduce absenteeism; (b) increase self-esteem; (c) increase positive school attitude through the use of peer group counseling program.

An analysis of the data compiled over the 10 month implementation period showed that the objectives were not met as stated. The first objective was to decrease truancy by 30%. There was a 14% decrease. The second objective, to increase students' self-esteem by 30%, showed only a 16% average gain in self-esteem. The third objective, to increase the positive attitude students would have towards school showed a 26% positive gain between pretest and mid-year test while all variables were constant. A comparison of mid-year test questionnaire to post test resulted in a 25% negative decrease in positive school attitude. The latter was influenced by an unexpected administrative and disciplinary code changes at mid-year.

Though the initial objectives of the practicum were so interfered with, the significance of this project was more with the identification of barriers than with the accomplishment of stated objectives. The practicum had a great deal of merit, in that it uncovered a series of obstacles to the institution of peer group counseling within an alternative education program.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community and Work Setting

The largest of 28 municipalities, Fort Lauderdale is also the seat of Broward County Government. One million two hundred thousand people live in Broward County, located on the southeast coast of Florida between Palm Beach County to the north and Dade County to the south. Among the cities of more than 500,000 population, living costs range from 34.4% above the nation's average in New York City, to 3.1% below the average in Indianapolis. In comparison, Fort Lauderdale is 9.2% above the national average for the quarter. Per capita personal income is $12,_)0 while the estimated buying income per household is $25,765 (Florida Department of Commerce, 1985).

High technology has arrived in Broward County. More than 20,000 electronic and high tech employees work in more than 100 firms located in the county. Motorola and Gould Companies are two largest manufacturing employers dealing with electronics and computers (Fort Lauderdale/Broward Chamber of Commerce, 1985).

The first school was built in Fort Lauderdale in 1899. In 1915, the Broward County School System was established. It has

since grown to a total of 159 schools and special centers serving a student enrollment of 12,673 with 7,420 instructional personnel. Broward County is the 9th largest school system in the U.S.A. and has become the largest fully accredited school system in the nation (Report of Dr. W. McFatter, 1984).

In 1983-84, the Florida Legislation authorized District School Boards to establish alternatives for students whose interests, needs and talents are not met in a traditional environment (students who are unsuccessful, disinterested or disruptive in that environment). Among the various programs designed, an Alternative Program at a Fort Lauderdale Middle School was initiated in 1983-84 for severely disruptive and truant students.

The following are some general characteristics of the 40 middle school students with a student/teacher ratio of 8/1, which reflects some of the reasons for poor academic and social performances: 49% of the students live with 1 parent, 38% classified Specific Learning Disability, 31% Emotionally Handicapped, 6% Emotionally and Mentally Retarded, 19% multiple classifications, 43% at least in detention once, 84% repeated at least one grade, 30% repeated more than one grade (Broward County Research Department, 1986). These students are prime candidates in adding to Florida's nationally ranked second highest drop out rate.

Each of the writer's students has been labeled as severely disruptive. They have a history of physical violence, abusive language, truancy, runaways and in many cases, police arrests and juvenile detention records. Some of the arrests have ranged from first degree murder and armed robbery to the less serious crime of shoplifting. Nevertheless, violence and truancy characterize these students, and efforts to stem these have not been very successful. For the most part, many of these parents have been driven to the point where they no longer know what to say or do.

Writer's Roles and Responsibilities

The writer is a classroom teacher at the Alternative Program which entered its fourth year in the fall of 1986. He has a B.S. degree in Elementary Education and a M.A. degree in Urban Education. The writer's teaching experience had been from teaching third to eighth grade. He has also taught as an adjunct professor at the University of Hartford associated with the Teacher Corps.

At the Alternative Program, the writer's primary responsibilities are those of a self-contained seventh and eighth grade alternative classroom teacher. The writer is responsible for all of the academic areas on both grade levels.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Statement

As Florida has the second largest drop out rate in the nation, there exists a need for a Drop Out Prevention Program, especially with middle school alternative students.

Evidence of the Problem

Forty-three percent of Broward County Freshmen achieved a lower than the required 1.5 grade-point average (Broward Students, 1986). In the same source, we find students who are not performing well, are more likely to drop out of school in the ninth and tenth grades. The rationale given regards age considerations; that those with poor performance records are more likely to be older than their grade-equivalent counterparts. For instance, 39% of ninth graders lacking the necessary grade-point average for graduation are legally able to drop out.

In February 1986, legislators in Florida adopted the Drop Out Prevention Act, which would make more options for alternative education available to unsuccessful students, as well as for those who have problems with pregnancy or drugs. Currently, alternative education is used mostly to isolate students with disciplinary problems from other students.

In Broward County 5,221 high school freshmen were unable to make the grades they will need to earn a diploma (Broward Students, 1986). Being thrust into high school, confronted with increasingly tougher standards only added to their academic troubles. This means that almost 43% of Broward County's ninth graders earned lower than a D-plus average in the first semester. Nearly 30% of the tenth graders and 16% of the eleventh graders did not meet the higher requirements to graduate. Nearly 10,000 freshmen, sophomores, and juniors will not graduate unless they manage to pull up their academic averages according to the figures complied after the first semester of this school year. Figures are not available for the second semester. Statistics show that these students have a history of failure and a good chance at joining the growing ranks of youths across the nation who drop out.

The Alternative Program's ultimate goal is to mainstream these students back into their feeder schools. At the time of this report, 2 students over the last 4 years have been successfully mainstreamed. Assuming the implementation of a successful intervention process, there would be an increase in prosocial behavior with concurrent decrease in aggression and negative expression on the part of the students. This

behavioral change should facilitate successful mainstreaming of a larger number of students.

Causes of the Problem

The failure of urban schools to keep their students is tied to the condition of inner-city population. Marquand (1986) stated that the high drop out rate is related to poverty and poverty is related to minorities. Studies show that black and Hispanic students are the most prone to drop out, with the Hispanic rate topping 40% nationwide. Educators also find explanations for the phenomenon with the concept of economic bifurcation. This suggests that while the economic middle class is growing larger, an equally large impoverished class is developing.

Some of the other causes why students drop out are:

1. Dislike of school.
2. Learning difficulty and low grades.
3. Emotional neglect.
4. Inaccurate self-concept.
5. History of failure.
6. Pregnancy/Marriage.
7. Pushed out/raised standards could not be met.
8. Burned out/trying too hard to succeed.
9. Migrant life-style.

10. Language/cultural barriers.
11. Poor home support for education.
12. Lack of supportive relationships.
13. Poor relationships with teachers/peers.

Judging by the available research, it seems reasonable to assume that unsuccessful students, whether underachievers or nonachievers, are likely to hold attitudes about themselves and their abilities which are pervasively negative.

Students with negative self-images rarely perform well in school (Brookover, 1967). The basic question is whether children see themselves negatively because of these performances or whether they perform poorly because they see themselves negatively? The best evidence now available suggests that it is a two-way street, that there is a continuous interaction between the self and academic achievement and one influences the other.

Morse (1964) found that the reported self-concept of ability was a better predictor of classroom achievement than IQ, and that this was true for both black and white students.

Ludwig and Maeher (1967) found that professed changes in the self-concept resulted in changes in preference and choice among middle school students. A student carriers with him/her certain attitudes about their abilities which play a primary role in how he/she performs in school. Yet, the sword cuts both ways, scholastic performance has a heavy impact on the self-concept.

The available information on the nonachiever suggest that

he/she holds unflattering views about him/herself. The nonachiever is in the unenviable position of lacking the ability to meet the demands of school, so that he/she must, unless the school makes special arrangements for him/her, face repeated failure.

Harding (1966) found that male high school students who dropped out, relative to those who stayed, had significantly lower self-concept of their academic ability when IQ and grade point averages were factored out. Harding concluded that a student's attitude is a crucial variable in predicting whether the student will continue in school or whether he will drop out.

Mann and Gold (1981) observed that although academic failure is a primary precursor to both disruptive school behavior and dropping out, only 32% of the students who drop out are educationally handicapped. They further noted that a nationwide study conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor showed that 70% of the drop outs had IQ scores above 90. Correspondingly, 68% of the student dropouts are capable students. Only 20% are involuntary dropouts or students who have been forced out of the school by school officials.

A recent study by Driscoll and Berle (1985) showed that intervention at the middle school level is crucial for preventing students from dropping out from or before high school.

Review of Literature

Our nation is faced with a school dropout problem of immense proportion. School officials in Boston disclosed that last year for the first time in the city's history, the number of high school dropouts exceeded the number of graduates. It represents a pattern repeated in large cities around the country. Experts say that while many suburban school districts are holding the dropout problem in check, in major urban centers, areas with the greatest population gain, the rates continue to inch upward.

Marquand (1986) reported that in Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, and Philadelphia, between 35 and 50% of the students fail to complete school. Nearly 1 million students dropped out of school in 1985 including up to 85% of all native American youths, 55% of black students, and 50% of Hispanic students.

In total, 1 out of every 4 students entering the eighth grade this year will not complete high school and 2.4 million students, up to one-half of the high school population in some major cities, are at risk of dropping out of high school.

There is evidence that adolescent peer group counseling facilitates increased self-awareness, self-control, and self-acceptance. As the group members communicate back and forth,

they begin to better understand each other and themselves. When someone's self-awareness and self-esteem are enhanced, he/she is more in touch with forces affecting him/her. Consequently, he/she is more likely to be able to exhibit self-control by making more rational choices (Fagen & Guedalis, 1977).

At the James B. Conant High School in Hoffman Estates, Illinois a new program, Achievement Motivation, was initiated for the unmotivated and chronically disruptive students. According to Grossnickle's (1985) "Interrupting the failure cycle and replacing it with successful patterns of thinking" (p. 278) was the approach that was taken. Peer group counseling seminars with 6 students per group were held for one period every other day for a semester. The group leader, a teacher, did not ask for the school history of the students, but was interested only in what happened during the sessions. Students were encouraged to interact and talk. Scenarios were staged and the students reacted to them. An important facet was to get students thinking about how they viewed themselves and what others thought about them. Friendships were also explored. The study showed that there were significant changes in lifestyles and goals among the students in the program.

Crisci (1986) discussed the Quest National Center, formed a decade ago, to equip youngsters between the ages of 10 to 18

with skills for successful living and learning. The semester long curriculum of the center dealt with specific concerns of adolescents as a theme for a unit, e.g., self-concept feelings, attitude, friends, peer pressure, decision making, careers, and drug abuse. Many of these discussions took place in small counseling groups with much input from the students. This year the program reached approximately 800,000 young people in 47 states and 7 foreign countries. Through this program, young people have gained much, including a sense of positive connection to their schools and communities. This was a strong antidote to feelings of alienation, despair and purposelessness.

Levine, Levine, and Eubanks (1984) noted that with targeted high risk students, the New York City Community District #12 had focused on the high-order skills. Group counseling that was provided every other week frequently focused on such topics as: orientation for sixth graders, career counseling, selecting a high school, problems of nonpromoted students and specialty groups for overweight students, and students with low self-esteem. In addition to group counseling, the after school detention program included a tutoring program. Meanwhile, a school/home liaison worker helped coordinate services for students with physical, social, or emotional problems.

Benson and Blocher (1976) appraised the effectiveness of developmental group counseling for low achieving tenth grade boys. This technique was primarily concerned with helping students master developmental tasks and develop a more adequate repertoire of coping behaviors. The ratio was 6/1 students to leader. The counseled students improved their grades, decreased in disciplinary referrals, improved feelings of self-esteem and showed a significant decrease in truancy.

Brodel, Ohlsen, Proff and Southard's (1960) gifted underachieving ninth grade students were provided with group counseling twice a week for 8 weeks. The counseled students improved significantly more than the control group with reference to achievement tests scores, acceptance of self and others, and ability to relate to peers, siblings, and parents.

One school system, that has identified general characteristics of a successful dropout prevention program, is the Denver Public School System. The district subscribes to the idea of tailoring a drop out prevention program to fit an individual pupil's needs, based on his/her reasons for dropping out. The individual prevention program needs to "begin at the primary level and continue through the secondary years" (Neill, 1979, p. 63).

Lodato, Sokoloff and Schwartz (1964) modified the attitudes of slow learners in grades 7 and 8 with group

counseling. On the basis of teacher's ratings, the students improved in their attitudes towards learning, authority figures, and school attendance.

Smith and Evans (1973) compared results achieved with experimental group counseling with individualized counseling to facilitate vocational development. Significantly better results were obtained with group counseling than with individual counseling procedures.

At the Reuther Alternative High School, which was composed of 550 high risk students, group counseling had been used extensively along with stressing the basic skills in math, science, social studies, and English. Wehlage (1983) reported that there was an effort to make these subject areas applicable to real world experiences. Through the use of group counseling, there was an emphasis on building self-esteem and responsibility. In part these objectives had been favorably met by having students engage in decision making as a group project.

For the most part, most alternative programs for students at risk of becoming dropouts; on account of academic failure and disruptive school behavior or both, incorporate such features as self-paced individualization or small group instruction in the basic skills of reading and mathematics, inculcate a positive philosophy, and focus on student's self-

esteem and motivation (Beach & Haverson, 1981).

In summary, it is apparent that these studies have stressed the affective concerns of high-risk students. Each has used the group counseling aspect to enhance self-esteem. Through these formal and informal programs, the participants showed significant gains.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Statement of Goals and Objectives

It was expected that the practicum will facilitate the students to: (a) feel good about their school experiences and the people associated with the school, and (b) perceive their classroom activities as being enjoyable and relevant.

The writer hopes that the implementation of this program will improve pupil's attitudes towards specifically, the following: (a) an overall average of a 30% decrease in truancy, (b) an overall average of a 30% increase in self-esteem, as measured by the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale (Piers & Harris, 1969), (c) a 30% increase in positive attitude towards school as measured by the Rundquist and Sletto School Attitude Questionnaire (Shaw & Wright, 1967).

These standards of performance were arrived upon from the writer's previous experiences with similar evaluation instruments used with alternative students. He found a 30% gain to be an optimal expectation for achievement using these instruments.

The objectives will be evaluated in terms of the differences in scores between the pre and post tests on the

Piers-Harris Scale and the Rundquist-Sletto Questionnaire. The latter questionnaire will also be used at midpoint for formative evaluation purposes to see if the implementation process is on track.

Description of Assessment Instruments

Piers and Harris (1969) developed the self-concept scale, "The Way I Feel About Myself." The scale was a self-report measure typically completed in about 15-20 minutes by children with a wide range of ages. Administered in groups, it required approximately a third grade readability level. It can be administered and scored by responsible, educated non-psychologist personnel. The Scale, consisting of 80 declarative statements, was designed primarily for research on the development of children's self-attitudes and correlations of these attitudes. Items are scored in the direction of adequate (high) or inadequate (low) self-concept according to the key. Average scores are usually considered to be those between the 31st and 70th percentile, or between the raw scores of 46 to 60. An individual with a raw score of 58 (percentile ranking of 63), equals or exceeds 63% of the normative group.

Rundquist and Sletto Attitude Questionnaire (Shaw & Wright, 1967), contained 22 items which ranged in content from:

(a) the effect of education upon one's leisure time, to (b) the effect upon economic opportunity to conflict between education and work. A person's score was the sum of the weighted alternatives, 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), endorsed by him/her. High scores indicated positive attitudes towards education.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of Literature

One solution to the drop out problem might be to create a truly excellent, separate curriculum for those with high ability, a different curriculum for average students, and a special curriculum to meet the needs of slow and reluctant learners. Movement from one curriculum to another should be easily possible upon proof of ability to do the work and diplomas should indicate clearly which curriculum the student has completed.

Watrous (1984) reported about such a school, the John Ericsson Junior High in Brooklyn, New York, where students were placed in high, medium, and low achievement groupings in English, mathematics, social studies, and science according to their combined scores on achievement tests in reading and mathematics. All classes were then scheduled at the same time for a given subject and grouping. Within each ability level, students were assigned heterogeneously. These classes generally include a wide range of abilities. This arrangement made it possible to reassign students from class to class within their ability level without introducing very wide extremes in achievement. This system appeared to be successful in its retentive power.

Edmonds (1979) reported on the Cleveland Middle School in Detroit, where the school was organized into three main strata or programs to help the ever rising drop out problem. The Excellence Program was for high achieving students who were placed in relatively small classes with a diverse curriculum of academic courses. The large majority of students were in Cleveland's regular program and a relatively small number were in the Success Program, for very low achievers.

Throughout most of the school the emphasis was on developing higher-order skills. To accomplish this, Cleveland's middle school teachers stressed holistic teaching, in which instruction centered on the development and application of functional language and thinking skills. For example, they systematically planned and implemented such language-oriented activities as public speaking, academic olympics, poetry reading, and dramatization.

Another approach used successfully at the Cleveland School was to have the principal and faculty reward students for successful behavior in all areas of the school's operation. They believed that such rewards not only helped develop a more positive self-esteem on the part of the students, but also developed a positive school climate. As part of the reward system, all students carried with them a form on which to record the points they received for good performance in

academics, athletics, and other activities. Many students seemed to be highly motivated by this daily record of their contributions and accomplishments. Students were rewarded in a variety of ways from trips, trophies, and banners to splash parties for classrooms, in which students as a group accumulated a high number of points. Since the implementation of this program, the inner-city adolescents have been consistently more successful in school, therefore, lessening the potential drop out problem.

Jacques (1982) reported on the Metropolitan Youth Center, a Colorado solution to the problem of high school dropouts. The first objective of the Center was to try to return each student to the mainstream of education. The philosophy of this program was to deny students the right to fail by giving them unlimited chances to succeed. Besides the basic curriculum of English, social, studies, mathematics, and reading, the Center offered a diversified art program which was structured to let students explore the field and develop marketable talents. Vocational training was available in auto-mechanics, business skills, drafting, welding, and electronics. In addition, the Center followed many students into the world of work, through a cooperative work-experience program.

There were no semesters and no grade-level identification. Each student's schedule was built around his/her available

time, depending on such factors as child care, and working hours.

A study by Copen and Lebwhol (1984) of the Walkabout program in Yorktown Heights, New York, revealed a program designed to assist high risk adolescents in their transition to adulthood. The philosophy of this program was to accelerate individual effectiveness and included: (a) confidence- trust in oneself, self-esteem, (b) attitude- positive attitude turned failure into an opportunity to learn and grow, whereas negative attitude became self-fulfilling prophecy and stifled the willingness to try new things, (c) responsibility- choice plus accountability, and (d) skills- the ability to do a job.

Parents, teachers, and community resource people helped students draw up a contract that spelled out the goals, objectives, and requirements of his/her Walkabout experience. Each contract included basic skills or competencies to be developed, a project that used these skills, and community service. Students received academic credit, not pay, for their experiences. The staff member who coordinated the Walkabout helped students plan their experiences and served as liaison between the school, the student, and the community.

Other Possible Solutions

Setting realistic social and academic goals is crucial to the success of any program. There is nothing more frustrating

for children than failing after doing their best. A teacher who is prepared to meet the students at their level and bring them forward at their own pace will help immensely to reduce unnecessary stressful situations and enhance the students' self-esteem.

Other possible solution strategies are:

1. Use drop out prone students as tutors to younger students in a peer tutoring program.
2. Encourage individual staff members to take a personal interest in 1 or 2 students both in school and outside of school, i.e., adopt-a-student program.
3. Promote drop out prone students to volunteer to help community social service agencies.
4. Establish a home visit program to improve home/school relations.
5. Invite various workers to talk to students about their jobs, need for a high school diploma, etc.
6. Initiate peer-group counseling.
7. Hands-on vocational training.
8. Initiate an individualized instructional program.
9. Provide a physical fitness program.
10. Provide for a parental effectiveness program.

Strategy Justification

The writer selected peer group counseling as an approach

for the implementation of a dropout prevention program with alternative adolescents. During the past 3 years, the writer had been involved in numerous impromptu "rap" sessions with the students. These sessions proved to be very informative and revealing into their personal lives. These sessions were found to be beneficial learning experiences for the students, especially in constructive decision making. Wanting to expand on this concept, a review of literature provided evidence that adolescent peer group counseling facilitated increased self-awareness, self-control, and self-acceptance. Several studies (Fagen & Guidalis, 1977; Grossnickle, 1985) showed that through peer group counseling there were significant changes in lifestyles and goals among the students.

Counseling Defined

A major purpose of counseling is changing oneself, others, and/or the physical milieu. Group counseling has been found to facilitate the development of feelings of self-worth, significance, responsibility, and identity as a person (Bernard & Fullmer, 1977).

According to Rogers (1942) counseling is a definitely structured permissive relationship which allows the person to gain an understanding of himself to a degree which enables him/her to take positive steps in the light of his/her new

orientation.

A hidden agenda of every counseling intervention is to encourage group members to believe in themselves, to rely on their own strengths and worthiness, rather than on others. Self-esteem and self-confidence are by-products of effectively led counseling groups, and nowhere else in the school curriculum is there an opportunity so dramatically presented than in a counseling setting. The counseling group attacks directly the problem of poor self-esteem, sets goals for all individuals to maximize their feelings of personal worth in all phases and activities of their lives.

Counseling Method Used

Peer group counseling was the method used during the implementation of this practicum. This procedure was defined as follows: (a) the students led their own discussion and interacted with one another, (b) the group leader (teacher) acted as facilitator to keep the discussions on track.

Group Program Structure

Peer influence was a vehicle of change and the change was achieved through a structured treatment program. Under this approach, staff and students worked together to help the students:

1. Identify individual problems.

2. Work on solving problems.

3. Overcome keeping their problems to themselves.

4. Help each other to successfully return to their home school.

For 1 hour twice a week, Tuesday and Friday, every student sat down with his or her group to discuss and work on problems. These included problems occurring within the alternative program as well as work on problems students had in the home school. The following points were stressed during the counseling sessions:

1. Each individual was more important than the collective.

2. The leader was not a member of the group.

3. Group counseling was for everyone.

4. A counseling group had no group goals, rather individual goals.

5. The group leader did not seek to heighten natural pressures inherent in a group.

6. A counseling group was not a confessional.

7. What goes on in a group was privileged communication.

8. Group members spoke for themselves in a counseling group.

9. Negative emotions were neither bad nor avoided in group counseling.

10. All behavior in counseling groups was neutral, no punishment was implemented.

11. Effectiveness in group counseling was measured by what went on outside the group.

In the beginning of the program there were 27 students and four classroom teachers (one of which was the writer). Due to attrition and school policy changes, only 18 students completed the implementation process. One student in each classroom acted as sergeant at arms (see Appendix A).

The Group Meeting

A procedure for conducting the 1 hour meeting was first established. Group leaders (teachers) were to work within this framework to improve as group leaders.

Preparation:

The group leader (teacher) should know as much about each group member as possible. Contact with previous teachers, parents, and counselors would provide valuable information.

Meeting:

The meetings began promptly at 1:00 P.M. each Tuesday and Friday. The leader was seated with his/her group ready to begin once the students were seated. The meeting was divided into three parts:

Part I (first 5 minutes)

The meeting began with a "review of the problems". Each

group member, in turn, mentioned the problems he/she had worked on and any difficulties and/or problems experienced since the last meeting.

Following a technique suggested by Dyer & Vriend (1977), the group leader asked the group to write down self-defeating behaviors they needed to change on an index card. The group leader defined self-defeating behavior such as: cranky, shy, short-tempered, fearful, lazy, guilty, impulsive, etc. The completed cards were collected by the leader, who then redistributed them, and instructed members to take any card but their own. After a number was assigned to each card, the leader directed the members to read the cards aloud so that everyone in the group could assign a rating to card #1, card #2, and so on until every card was rated by all members. Using a rating scale from 1 to 10, a rating of 5 indicated absolute indifference to whether or not the group ought to spend time working with the member whose concern had been announced. A 6 or 7 implied a mildly positive attitude toward using group time to help that member, and an 8, 9, or 10 was a very positive rating. Group members were encouraged to rate each concern as they heard it, based on their own personal attitudes, and how relevant the concern was to their own personal interests. When all the cards had been rated, the leader asked that they be quickly reread in the same numerical order so that members

could recheck the rating they gave and change them if they wished.

Next, the members announced the rating they gave to each concern. The leader tallied them, gave the totals for each card and then collected the cards in the order of the one with the highest collective rating, the next highest, and so on. The card with the highest was then read aloud, the individual who wrote it was identified, and the group counseling began with the focus on that person's concern.

This technique facilitated group members to talk about concerns that received a low rating and why that occurred.

Part II (50 minutes)

The bulk of the meeting was directed towards helping one member with his/her problem. The group leader helped each member sort out individual goals, and think and behave more positively. He/she helped the individual member to identify significant associations, relationships, situations, and self-performance in their current lives in which thinking, feeling, and doing are evidently self-defeating. Then the group leader helped move each individual towards self-understanding by examining why such self-defeating behavior persists and possible alternatives.

The next step in the process involved setting goals. Every effort was made to make them specific and realistic for

the individual member or additional members who shared like concerns. After goal-setting, the individual tested proposed alternative behaviors to the group where genuine helping interventions, activities, or simulations were provided.

Part III (last 5 minutes)

The group leader stopped the meeting at 1:55 P.M. and used the last 5 minutes to summarize the meeting. The leader used the summary to:

1. Review what took place and what had been accomplished in the meeting.

2. Acknowledged participation of various members (or lack of it).

3. Reemphasized positive comments by students and their concerns regarding what transpired during the meeting.

4. Encouraged the group to help each other outside of the meeting.

5. Reflected on the group attitudes and undercurrents of what had taken place.

6. Recognized and acknowledged change, or the effort to change on the part of an individual member.

Responsibilities of Group Leaders

Group leaders (teachers) must be familiar with the operation of the total alternative programs. This required a

continuous examination of information and materials relating to students and their group. The following were the responsibilities for each group leader:

1. Be familiar with each group member's file.
2. Talk informally with other staff members regarding activities of group members.
3. Attend and participate in weekly feedback meetings with other leaders and staff members.
4. Keep the group focused on the problem at hand.

Group and Individual Responsibilities

Responsibility, as it applied to the alternative program had wide applications. The term should be used frequently by both staff and students. Responsibility was often implied when we were discussing such matters as care, concern and help. Within the group we emphasized the responsibility each student had for his/her own behavior, and importance of helping each other to become more responsible people.

The writer believed that in the alternative program and eventually in the home school, each student had the responsibility to work on his/her problems and to help other students with their problems.

This was accomplished not only during the group meetings,

but was stressed at all times in all areas where the students interacted with one another. Acknowledgements were given when students showed good judgement. Group peer pressure was exerted when a student failed to show good judgement over his/her behavior.

Feedback Meetings

Weekly group leader meetings, led by the writer, were held along with the rest of the support staff and administration. These were primarily held for the enhancement of group leader skills. The purpose of feedback was as follows:

1. Reviewed week's happenings by the group leaders.
2. Reviewed techniques that showed positive results.
3. Discussed common problem areas and alternative solutions.
4. Shared information that might be helpful.

Calendar of Activities

The implementation of this practicum began on September 8, 1986, and ended on June 15, 1987. The calendar of activities were as follows:

1. September 8 - the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale was administered along with the Rundquist-Sletto School Attitude Questionnaire.

2. September 9 - implementation of the Peer Group Counseling every Tuesday and Friday throughout the school year.

3. January - Rundquist-Sletto Questionnaire readministered to gauge progress.

4. June - post testing with Piers-Harris and Rundquist-Sletto.

5. August - dissemination of abstract to cluster members.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND DISSEMINATION

Results

At the start of this practicum there were 26 students in the program. Due to administrative policy changes, incarcerations, runaways and pregnancy, the results reflect only the 18 students who completed the program. The results of the practicum were generally not as expected, but there was a small measure of success with some of the students.

The first objective of the practicum called for a decrease in absenteeism by 30%. This objective was not met. Of the 18 students during the first of half of the school year, there were 151 unexcused absences; contrasted by 133 absences during the second half of the year. This resulted in a 14% decrease (see Appendix B). A further analysis of the data revealed a 48% increase in days suspended in the second half of the school year. This was due to the administrative change at mid-year, along with a total disciplinary code change.

The second objective was to increase the students' self-esteem by 30%, as measured by the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale (Piers-Harris, 1969). Eighty was the highest achievable score for the 80 questions which require a yes/no answer. Of the 18 students in the program, 17 showed positive improvement. Eight of the 18 students showed a 20% or more increase; except

for one student who showed a negative change. The other nine students showed a 4-19% improvement resulting in an average gain of 16% (see Appendix C).

The third objective, an increase in positive attitude towards school by 30%, as measured by the Rundquist-Sletto Attitude Questionnaire (Shaw & Wright, 1967) was not fully met. The total number of questions were 22 with weighted score values of 1-5, making 110 the highest attainable score. For more accurate analysis of the results, the writer compared the pretest and mid-test, then compared the mid-test to the post-test. The rationale was that the pre and mid questionnaires were administered while the administration and disciplinary policies were relatively stable. This showed a 26% gain towards positive school attitude. A comparison of the mid-point to post questionnaires resulted in a -25% decrease (see Appendix D). The latter was influenced by an administrative and disciplinary code at mid-point of the school year.

Conclusions

In view of all the disruptive factors, the practicum results were encouraging at least for the 18 students especially in terms of self-concept scale. It is also possible that had the practicum not been implemented, the situation would have been far worse. The practicum proved to be of value also in identifying several factors that could affect

implementation of a well planned program. The writer will now trace some of the events that made the implementation of the practicum a frustrating experience.

During the planning phase of this practicum, a major concern emerged with regards to the degree of acceptance in participation by staff. The staff felt that peer group counseling was an old concept lacking significant validation of its merits; especially with a group of alternative students. This concern, however, did not dissuade the writer on the grounds that the literature review proved contrary to their beliefs and in favor of establishing peer counseling support groups.

The beginning phase of the implementation was marked with a great deal of resistance on the part of some of the students towards the group leaders. Alternative education student's attitude toward teachers of alternative programs was such that there was an undercurrent of hostility, mistrust, and loaded with power issues.

Each classroom had its own chemistry and hierarchy. When an emergent student classroom "leader" rejected efforts to participate in the group, the rest of the class (with few exceptions) followed suit. At times, during the early phases of the group, the anger and frustration felt by some of the students manifested itself in the form of physical and verbal

abuse, directed at each other and occasionally at the group leaders (teachers).

This type of behavior was anticipated by the writer and discussed with the group leaders at length. The key was to reach the student leaders in each classroom and evoke a positive response from them during the sessions.

This was accomplished by giving the classroom student emergent leader authority (of sorts), by appointing him/her sergeant at arms which gave him/her quasi recognition as being in charge of the proceedings. Not surprisingly, the roles were accepted and order was restored during the group sessions. Once the groups were beginning to function, the role of sergeant at arms faded away, and a comradery of sorts began to materialize. This was also due to the fact that over a period of several weeks the students began to feel more comfortable with each other and with group leaders (teachers).

In addition to the group process, the students had been aware of the writer's availability for private conferences during which time a variety of issues were dealt with. The rationale was based on the view that being afforded an opportunity to discuss something in private can clarify issues to the extent that those issues may now be presented to the group without fear of embarrassment or ridicule.

Unfortunately, due to the nature of the alternative program, attrition was a major problem. There was a continuous turnover of student population due to the following: arrests, dropouts, runaways, pregnancy, reentry, and suspensions. This led to a continual disruption of group cohesiveness.

Unplanned intervention with the group leaders by the writer led to a recognition of the barriers being imposed not only by the attrition problem, but by some of the teachers as well. In general the problems stemmed from: (a) teacher burn out (b) frustration (c) lack of immediate, concrete results (d) personality conflicts (e) apathy (f) group process discontinuity and (g) professional jealousy. Ongoing attempts at meeting some of the teachers resistances were only marginally successful.

At the commencement of the project, there was an implied assumption that the environment would remain relatively sterile and free of significant extraneous and intervening variables. Such was not the case. A mid-year change in administration resulted in drastic changes of the disciplinary practices and procedures which in turn manifested itself in increased suspensions and a general rebellious attitude by teachers and students alike. For example, when in the past a student was suspended for an infraction of the school code, the average length of suspension was 3-5 days. However, the new

administrations suspension policy increased to a 7-10 day average. The number of suspensions also increased drastically during the second half of the year. The students being out for 2 weeks at a time caused an immense disruption to the group process.

Though the initial objectives of the practicum were so interfered with, the significance of this project was more with the identification of barriers than with the accomplishment of stated objectives. A 14% decrease in truancy and a 16% increase in self-esteem seemed substantial with alternative students. The practicum had a great deal of merit, in that it helped uncover a series of concrete barriers to the institution of peer group counseling within the alternative education program.

Given the circumstances under which the practicum occurred, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the strategies employed in the peer group counseling were effective with the majority of the students at least so far in preventing further deterioration. Working with these 18 students was an effort and the main conclusion that seems to emerge is that regardless of external circumstances, a persistent effort will pay off.

Recommendations

For anyone who wishes to implement this program within

their school, there are several factors that should be considered. Teacher burn out should be addressed prior to and during the implementation phase. It is not unreasonable to assume that teachers of highly disruptive alternative students would benefit from counseling sessions designed to help the teachers cope with these students and provide various management techniques. The originator of a similar program should utilize an open door policy giving the teachers an opportunity to vent their frustrations and concerns.

The administration should be apprised of the importance of this type of program. Their support and cooperation is paramount to its success and to the progress of the students involved. Prior to the implementation, a discussion with the administration is extremely important about any policy which could have a direct effect upon the factors directly relating to the program (i.e., suspension policies, referrals, tardies, absenteeism).

Any testing materials used for this program should have the following characteristics: (a) low to moderate readability level (b) be succinct and (c) have ease of tabulation.

Dissemination

This practicum has been discussed with the Director of Alternative Education in Broward County and with State House

Representatives concerned with Drop Out Prevention. A copy will be sent to them. Also, copies will be made available to each alternative center in Broward County. An abstract will be given to each cluster member.

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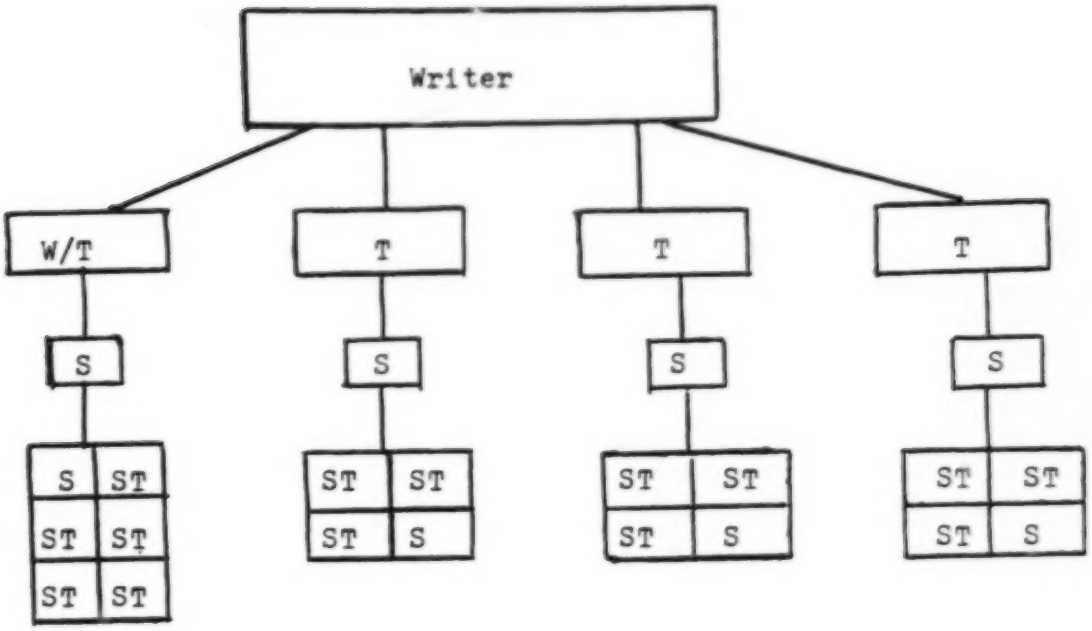
APPENDIX A

PROGRAM HIERARCHY

PROGRAM HIERARCHY



KEY:

T- teacher (group leader)

W- writer

S- sergeant at arms

ST- student

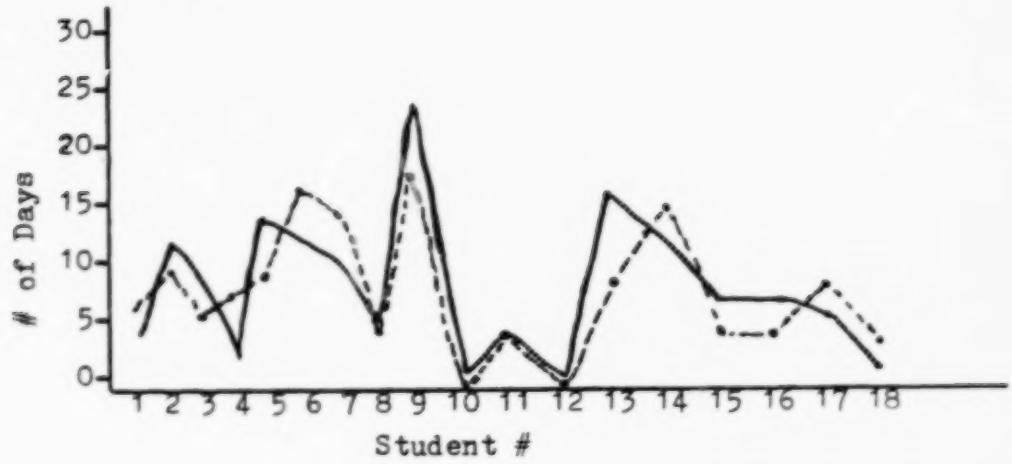
APPENDIX B

UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

UNEXCUSED ABSENCES DUE TO SUSPENSIONS

Figure 1

Unexcused Absences

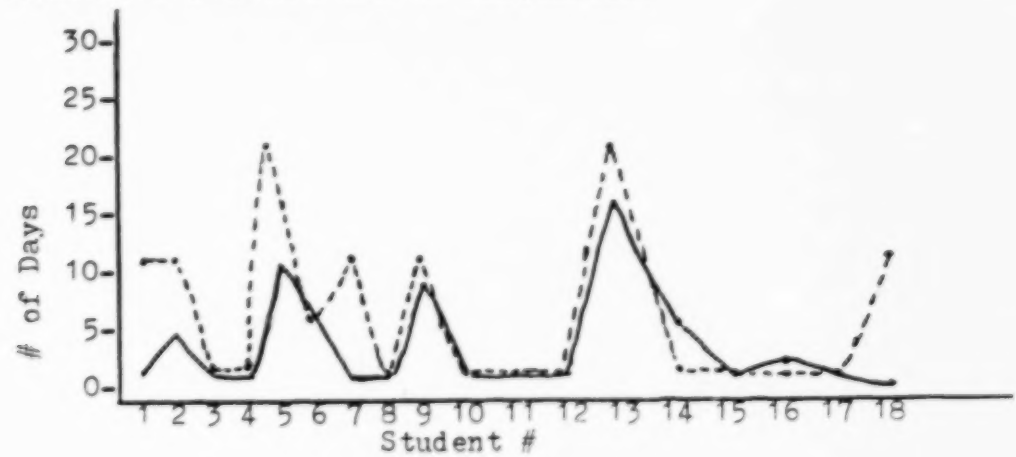


_____ 1st. semester

--------- 2nd. semester

Figure 2

Unexcused Absences due to Suspensions



_____ 1st. semester

--------- 2nd. semester

APPENDIX C

RESULTS OF THE PIERS-HARRIS SELF-CONCEPT SCALE

RESULTS OF THE PIERS-HARRIS SELF-CONCEPT SCALE

Student	Pre-test	Post-test	% Gain/Loss
1	56	62	13%
2	50	67	25%
3	60	65	8%
4	60	71	15%
5	42	53	21%
6	54	56	4%
7	55	71	23%
8	57	69	17%
9	41	51	20%
10	40	47	15%
11	39	68	43%
12	43	70	39%
13	44	32	-37%
14	50	72	31%
15	52	72	28%
16	65	70	7%
17	70	70	0%
18	61	75	19%

The Piers-Harris Self-Concept Questionnaire consisted of 80 yes/no questions. The highest possible score was 80.

APPENDIX D

RESULTS OF THE RUNDQUIST-SLETTO QUESTIONNAIRE

RESULTS OF THE RUNDQUIST-SLETTO QUESTIONNAIRE

Student	Pre-test	Mid-pt.	%Gain/ Loss	Post-test	%Gain/ Loss
1	51	67	23%	48	-28%
2	40	56	28%	46	-22%
3	31	46	33%	33	-39%
4	37	50	26%	39	-28%
5	43	77	44%	69	-12%
6	51	60	15%	50	-20%
7	31	73	58%	42	-28%
8	89	93	4%	90	- 3%
9	26	35	9%	25	-29%
10	47	63	25%	50	-26%
11	38	55	33%	30	-47%
12	37	55	30%	49	-12%
13	22	35	37%	22	-37%
14	46	61	15%	43	-18%
15	50	66	33%	53	-20%
16	45	60	25%	47	-27%
17	55	69	25%	49	-40%
18	50	65	23%	45	-20%

The Rundquist-Sletto Questionnaire consisted of 22 weighted questions, 1(strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree). The highest possible score was 110.